



OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA IN KYRGYZSTAN

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to determine whether there is an occupational burnout within the American University-Central Asia or there is not. Occupational burnout is a type of emotional stress resulting in exhaustion, feeling of meaninglessness, lack of enthusiasm and inefficiency at the work place. Burnout consists of three scales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. During the research the surveying method was used. The questionnaire included demographic questions and Maslach Burnout Inventory questions. As a result of the research, the relationship between occupational burnout and several factors like presence of children, age and years of work were found.

Keywords: Occupational Burnout, American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

1. Introduction

The term ‘burnout’ was first introduced into the literature by Freudenberger in the early 1970s. According to him burnout is a state of fatigue or frustration resulted from professional relationships that failed to produce the expected rewards (1974:159–165).

Although the term ‘burnout’ was firstly identified by Clinical psychologist Herbert Freudenberger in 1970s, the spread of the term ‘burnout’ took place in 1980s after the researches of Social psychologist Christina Maslach. She defined burnout as a psychological syndrome involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment that had occurred among various professionals who work with other people in challenging situations. According to Maslach, usually, people with client-oriented professions like teachers, police officers, lawyers, and nurses suffer from burnout syndrome more (1982:2-10).

However, it is difficult to measure burnout, Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson developed the most widely used instrument for assessing burnout, namely, the Maslach Burnout Inventory. According to the Maslach Burnout Inventory, burnout is made up of

exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Baum, 1997:275). Moreover, the Maslach Burnout Inventory captures three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA) (Lambert, McCarthy, 2006:147, 187). One more burnout concept was presented by Melamed and co-workers. The concept views burnout “as a multidimensional construct consisting of emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, and cognitive weariness, which together represents the core component of burnout” (Lundgren-Nilsson et al., 2012:1).

If we refer to other researches about burnout, then the term ‘burnout’ can be stated as a type of psychological stress. Job burnout or occupational burnout is “an impairment of motivation to work, resulting in a growing inability to mobilize interest and abilities” (Potter, 1995:1). According to Potter, occupational burnout has the following warning signals: feeling of frustration, emotional outbursts, sense of alienation, substandard performance and increased use of drugs and alcohol. In case if the warning signals are not identified as pre-burnout symptoms, then an employee generally begins to feel moral exhaustion and interpersonal problems due to negative emotions and declining performance. In the end, these factors lead to serious health problems and feeling of misery and meaninglessness. A person with burnout suddenly feels strongest fatigue and feeling of apathy without visible causes. Moreover, due to the reason the symptoms of occupational burnout are difficult to detect, an employee does not know that s/he is suffering from burnout until it becomes severe. While one individual can cope with stress and stressors and avoid burnout, the other cannot cope with them.

According to Ladstätter and Garrosa (2008:1-4) burnout appears spontaneously in customer-oriented professions like social workers, nurses, teachers, and others as well. The reason may be hidden in the necessity of work with different people, which provides high stress work environment and emotional demands of the job. Ladstätter and Garrosa (2008:1-4) compare burnout to a “broken car battery that cannot be recharged accurately losing power”. This is a good example to demonstrate what employees feel when they put more effort into their work than they receive.

Referring to John Arden (2002:105-106), occupational burnout can be a result of lack of challenge. The job may in once become boring and uninspiring. Moreover, it may become uninteresting. The author stated in his book “Surviving job stress: How to overcome workday pressures” that job burnout occurs if: an employee is co-dependent or in other words cannot delegate several tasks; an employee cannot regret tasks which s/he cannot accomplish; an employee feels that the job is monotonous and repetitive; and if an employee has performed the several duties during many years.

One more reason of occupational burnout lies in the work overload. Gryna and Frank (2003:3) state that the work overload happens when job demand is more than an employee's resources. According to them, the usual symptoms occur after long workdays with overtimes, no vacations and taking work to home. From the previous symptoms it can be stated that work overload usually leads to stress, and long stress at the same time leads to burnout.

The other researchers Ladstätter and Garrosa (2008:1-4) describe the reasons why burnout is increasing nowadays. These reasons are:

1) The emergence of the service sector. Due to rapid growth of human-oriented professions and expansion of service provision, employees who have to deal with people on everyday basis due to the emotional demands face burnout in their daily work.

2) Labeling. Today in the era of globalization and Internet, people have more access to information, and professional terms like 'stress' are more often observed in our daily lives. And if only a few decades ago people did not know they are suffering from stress, now they can easily diagnose or over diagnose stress on their own.

3) Individualization. Due to the reason people become more self-oriented and the reason of losing commitment to social communities like family and clan, people have to build their own networks and it makes them demanding and unsatisfied.

4) Increased emotional and mental workload. Again, due to the development of new technologies, employees have to work more mentally than before. If fifty years before work force was important, today there is a strong need in professionals.

5) The weakening of professional authority. Before the authority of professionals was admired; however, nowadays, everyone has to be professional.

6) Changed psychological contract. Employees have to give more psychologically and get less.

Although occupational burnout is broadly researched worldwide, there are scant studies made in Kyrgyzstan. There is a research "Academic Burnout, Academic Procrastination and GPA in junior and senior students of the American University of Central Asia" made by AUCA student Firuza Fynchina; however, the study looks at burnout from the student prospective. In Kyrgyzstan job burnout is mostly described during psychological trainings in the "how to cope with burnout" key and cannot be relevant to this study. The purpose of this research is to study job burnout within the American University of Central Asia from the personnel perspective that is why the hypotheses are as follows:

a. H_0 : There is a job burnout within AUCA.

H_a : There is no job burnout within AUCA.

b. H_0 : There is a relationship between job burnout and years of work.

H_a : There is no relationship between job burnout and years of work.

c. H_0 : There is a relationship between job burnout and presence of children.

H_a : There is no relationship between job burnout and presence of children.

2. Research methodology

This section describes the aim and the place of the research, the research sample, data collection and analysis, and dependent and independent variables.

2.1. The aim and the place of the research

The aim of this research is to study job burnout within the American University of Central Asia. AUCA has a staff of 283 people dedicated to creating the best educational experience for AUCA students. The number of female employees is 167, and the number of male employees is 116. The staff oversees all aspects of fundraising in support of the University, overseeing the work of the University, and managing the human resource potential services of AUCA (https://auca.kg/en/auca_at_a_glance/).

2.2. The research sample

American University of Central Asia (AUCA) is an international, multi-disciplinary learning community in the American liberal arts tradition. Its curriculum includes the Preparatory Program, twelve undergraduate majors and three graduate programs. In addition to its top-flight academic programs, AUCA is committed to freedom of expression, critical inquiry and academic honesty. AUCA is the first university in Central Asia to offer US accredited degrees in liberal arts programs through a partnership with Bard College in the United States. In addition to Bard, AUCA maintains partnerships with a number of universities and organizations worldwide.

AUCA is particularly proud of its reputation for academic honesty, both among individual students and faculty. The university has in place all the necessary safeguards to steward large grants, as they have demonstrated both with completed grants from organizations such as the Open Society Institute, USAID, the Mellon Foundation as well as with current grants, including a \$5M grant awarded by USAID. AUCA is proud, through the work of its Tian Shan Policy Center (TSPC) and Central Asian Studies Institute (CASI), to have partnered on sponsored research projects with (among others) the Open Society Institute, the Soros Foundation, the Aga Khan Foundation, USAID, UNICEF, DFID, and many others.

The success of AUCA is evident in its 2,500 graduates, who continue their education at well-respected universities like Harvard, Yale, Indiana University, the Sorbonne, and Central European University. AUCA graduates can also be found working at prestigious organizations across the globe including the BBC, Citibank, Cisco Systems, Deloitte & Touche, Google, IBM, USAID, World Bank, and many more¹.

70 respondents of the American University of Central Asia filled in the questionnaires in order to define whether there is an occupational burnout at the university or there is not. Among them there are 60 female employees and 10 male employees.

Measurement of the reliability coefficient is high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75). Reliability coefficients for Emotional exhaustion, Depersonalization and Personal accomplishment are 0.88, 0.76 and 0.80 respectively. Emotional exhaustion consists of 9 questions, Depersonalization consists of 5 questions and Personal accomplishment consists of 8 questions.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

During this survey the respondents filled in the questionnaires that included demographic part and Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) part. The questionnaire consisted of 9 demographic questions in order to gather general information about the university staff and Maslach Burnout Inventory part.

Maslach Burnout Inventory part developed by Christina Maslach consisted of 22 questions. Respondents were asked to mark one of five options on a five-point scale "Never", "A few times a year", "A few times a month", "A few times a week" and "Everyday". The points were given from zero to four respectively.

The MBI addresses three general scales:

Emotional exhaustion: 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13, 14, 16, 20

Depersonalization: 5, 10, 11, 15, 22

Personal accomplishment: 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, 21

High emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low personal accomplishment show burnout.

Table 1. Range of Scores Indicating Levels of Burnout by Sub-Scale².

	LOW	MOD	HIGH
Emotional Exhaustion	0-16	17-26	27+
Depersonalization	0-6	7-12	13+
Personal Accomplishment	39+	32-38	0-31

Data in this survey were analyzed using MS Excel and SPSS 16 computer programs.

¹ AUCA at a glance. Bishkek. Available from: <https://auca.kg/en/auca_at_a_glance/>

² Survey Results Using the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Available from <<http://www.lib.niu.edu/2001/ip010725.html>>

2.4. Dependent and Independent variables

Dependent variables: mean points of university employees.

Independent variables: gender, age, presence of children, number of children, difficulty to get to work, thoughts of retirement, salary, growth opportunity.

Table 2. Demographic Variables of Respondents

Variables	Quantity	Percentage
Gender		
Male	10	14,29%
Female	60	85,71%
Age		
20-30	36	51,43%
31-40	26	37,14%
41-50	6	8,57%
more than 51	2	2,86%
Presence of children		
Yes	44	62,86%
No	26	37,14%

From the above table it is seen that 85,71% of all surveyed respondents are women, 51,43% are 20-30 years old, 62,86% of employees have children.

Table 3. Job and Tenure Information of Respondents

Variables	Quantity	Percentage
Years at AUCA		
1-3 years	40	57,14%
4-7 years	14	20,00%
8-11 years	16	22,86%
more than 12 years	0	0,00%
Do you face difficulties to get to your work?		
always	4	5,71%
sometimes	40	57,14%
never	24	34,29%
other	2	2,86%
Do you think of retirement?		
I often think of it	2	2,86%
I sometimes think of it	30	42,86%
I never think of it	28	40,00%
other	10	14,29%
Your salary is ...		
more than enough	0	0,00%
enough	26	37,14%
not enough	38	54,29%
not enough at all	6	8,57%
Is there an opportunity to grow within AUCA?		
Yes	44	62,86%
No	26	37,14%

From the previous table we can see that 57,14% of respondents work during 1-3 years; 57,14% of respondents sometimes face difficulties to get to the work; 42,86% of respondents sometimes think of retirement (however, 40,00% of respondents never think of it); 54,29% of respondents think their salaries are not enough; and 62,86% of respondents think there is an opportunity to grow within AUCA.

Table 4. Maslach Burnout Inventory Results within AUCA

	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal Accomplishment
Low	34	6	0
Mod	32	48	0
High	4	16	70
	Emotional exhaustion percentage	Depersonalization percentage	Personal Accomplishment percentage
Low	48,57%	8,57%	0,00%
Mod	45,71%	68,57%	0,00%
High	5,71%	22,86%	100,00%

As it is known from the Maslach's burnout inventory, high emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low personal accomplishment show burnout. From the table above we can see that emotional exhaustion among respondents is whether low or moderate: 48,57% and 45,71% respectively. Only 5,71% of respondents feel high emotional exhaustion. According to Maslach, Leiter and Schaufeli when trying to investigate a single dimension for burnout, as an alternative approach, in their article "Measuring burnout" [15], three dimensions of burnout were reduced to a single and key dimension – Emotional Exhaustion. If we look at the table, high emotional exhaustion percentage is almost negligible comparing to low and moderate emotional exhaustion. Referring to the data related to depersonalization, it is clearly seen that prevailing level of depersonalization is moderate making 68,57%. Despite these results, if we look at the last personal accomplishment dimension, we can observe that personal accomplishment rate is 100% high meaning that all 70 respondents surveyed have high job burnout at this dimension of burnout.

Table 5. Relationship between Respondents' Gender and Burnout Dimensions

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Emotional exhaustion	male	10	17,20	7,2541	,033
	female	60	16,73	5,0282	
Depersonalization	male	10	10,80	3,0840	,621
	female	60	10,76	2,8957	
Personal Accomplishment	male	10	12,40	4,7888	,020
	female	60	10,56	3,4216	
Burnout	male	10	13,46	4,4919	,047
	female	60	12,68	3,1412	

If we compare male and female respondents of the American University of Central Asia, it is seen that male respondents are more emotionally exhausted than female respondents are. If we look at depersonalization points, it can be stated that there is no significant difference between male and female respondents. In personal accomplishment scale, again male respondents have more points than the female ones. In general, according to the results, males are suffering from job burnout more than females. Now let us look at burnout differences according to the presence of children.

Table 6. Relationship between Presence of Children and Burnout Dimensions Group Statistics

	Children	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Emotional exhaustion	no	44	17,18	4,7704	,024
	yes	26	16,15	6,2334	
Depersonalization	no	44	11,04	1,8671	,002
	yes	26	10,30	4,1062	
Personal accomplishment	no	44	11,13	2,7159	,000
	yes	26	10,30	4,8889	
Burnout	no	44	13,12	2,2971	,000
	yes	26	12,25	4,6036	

Respondents without children are more emotionally exhausted than those respondents who have children. The same picture can be viewed in personal accomplishment and depersonalization dimensions. According to these three factors, we can note that respondents with children suffer from job burnout less than respondents without children. From these it can be stated that presence of children can serve as a factor decreasing occupational burnout. Now let us look at job burnout from the perspective of age.

Table 7. Relationship between Respondents' Age and Burnout Dimensions

	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Personal accomplishment	20-30	36	11,00	2,8284	,024
	31-40	26	11,61	4,3550	
	41-50	6	6,66	3,1411	
	51+	2	10,00	,0000	
	Total	70	10,82	3,6632	

When analyzing occupational burnout according to age, the differences were found only in personal accomplishment scale. The mean is bigger at the 31-40 years age group. The lowest level of burnout is in 41-50 years age group.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The main purpose of this research was to determine the presence of occupational burnout within employees of the American University of Central Asia. The research was made according to Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). As it is known from the Maslach's burnout inventory, high emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low personal accomplishment show burnout. MBI is very popular among researchers; however, "some authors have noted that the two subscales of the MBI are completely negatively worded, whereas the third subscale (personal accomplishment) is only positively worded (Demerouti et al., 2001 from Reis et al., 2014:2).

From the research, we see that most of the respondents are newcomers and work during short period of time. Moreover, more than the half of the surveyed respondents face difficulties while getting to work. Almost the same quantity of staff sometimes thinks of retirement. More than the half of the surveyed respondents think their salaries are not enough; however, they think that there is an opportunity to grow within the university.

According to different studies it can be "confirmed that dealing with high workload under time pressure affect emotional exhaustion" (Pisanti et al, 2011:829-837). Moreover, according to Leiter and Maslach "Exhaustion is often considered the strongest, primary element of burnout, and thus a suitable proxy for the entire phenomenon" (2016:2). If we look at burnout phenomena according to gender, we can conclude that at AUCA male employees are more emotionally exhausted than female ones. Some researches note that burnout among women employees is less than among males; however, some research literature speaks against gender differences on emotional exhaustion (Richter, Kostova, Harth, Wegner, 2014: 1-5). As a result of the study, it can be concluded that emotional exhaustion among respondents is whether low or moderate, high emotional exhaustion within respondents is negligible comparing to low and moderate emotional exhaustion.

One more interesting thing about job burnout at the American University is that respondents with children suffer from occupational burnout less than those without children; however, some studies have found that "the number of children (while working more than 40 hours a week) are positively associated with exhaustion and the burnout syndrome" (Richter, Kostova, Harth, Wegner, 2014: 1-5).

One more important research result is that elder employees of AUCA suffer from burnout less. Finnish authors state that "during the work career, burnout probably both decreases and increases with age... Nowadays employees do not stay in the same situation throughout their work career" (Ahola et al., 2008: 3).

After investigating the levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment, in common, we see that burnout at the university is moderate. In addition to this, there is a relationship between age and presence of children and job burnout.

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